

critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Opening This Week

An Evening with Beatrice Lillie-Edward Duryea Dowling presents Beatrice Lillie and Reginald Gardiner. Eadie and Rack, duo pianists, and a group of supporting players complete the bill. Limited engagement.

Digests of Current Reviews

Mr. Pickwick-Plymouth, 9/17/52. Weekly reviewers generally agreed with daily colleagues that Playwrights' Company production of Stanley Young's adaptation of Dickens' "Pickwick Papers" was mildly amusing fun. Two thought it too mild for an evening's enjoyment. Hobe, Variety, admitted Dickens addicts might enjoy it, but felt less disposed playgoers would find low voltage production anemic. Shipley, New Leader, found that the classic novel which appealed to the child in us appears childish when actors are added. John Burrell's direction credited by majority for keeping play moving. George Howe's debut in this country hailed, while supporting cast headed by Nigel Green and Estelle Winwood shared applause. Francis, Billboard, had fun but was disappointed that Howe did not look like his conception of Mr. Pickwick. Keating, Cue, labeled it a thoroughly delightful comedy. Time reviewer found show a rather refreshing change for Broadway, finely acted and perfectly directed. Newsweek man also found it amusing and engaging. Gibbs, New Yorker, lists it as a fairly satisfactory little comedy with some appealing scenes and some overly quaint scenes. Beaufert, Christian Science Monitor, joined majority in okaying play, but thought cast should have played with a more well defined and assimilated style. All noted that true Dickens' fans had no complaint because author admitted his work was "freely adapted" from the original.

Out of Town Reviews

If second act of In Any Language can be rewritten to equal the first in the Edmund Beloin and Henry Garsen comedy, producers Jule Styne and George Abbott may have a worth while Broadway comedy, trade paper reviewers commented after New Haven debut... Bernardine, new Mary Chase comedy presented by Irving Jacobs and Guthrie McClintic, has slim NY chances as it now stands, Elie, Variety, reported after Boston tryout. Elements of either fine drama or a funny comedy are here, but dull text and static plot do not help.

Partners On Stage

Domestic happiness among artists affects the playgoing public, notes "Stage" editorial honoring Lunts' London appearance in Neel Coward's Quadrille. The public likes to believe that popular personalities, playing opposite each other on stage, are also happily married in private life. It is small wonder that playwrights have been inspired to write plays for the Lunts, who have been on the stage for 30 years and married for 28 of these years.

News & Notes

Top Banana tour opens October 6th in Philadelphia...Constance Carpenter signed to run off play contract in The King and I...Krutch, former Nation critic, to lecture at Cornell University...ANTA Forum Series opens October 7th with Margaret Webster, Marge Jones, Blanche Yurka and Clarence Derwent discussing "Is New Talent Being Blocked in the Theatre."

' Cumulative NYC Ratings '

| D - Daily | W - Weekly | M - Monthly | B - Broadcast |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| DT - NY Times | DJC - Journal of Commerce | WCM - Chr. Science Monitor | |
| DH - NY Herald Tribune | DWJ - Wall Street Journal | WC - Commonwealth | |
| DN - NY News | DWW - Women's Wear | WCU - Cue | |
| DM - NY Mirror | WB - Billboard | WN - Nation | |
| DC - NY Compass | WV - Variety | WNR - New Republic | |
| DP - NY Post | WCD - Critical Digest | WNS - Newsweek | |
| DP - NY Journal American | WGN - George Jean Nathan | WNY - New Yorker | |
| DJ - NY World Tele-Sun | WWM - Ward Morehouse | WSR - Saturday Review | |
| DW - Brooklyn Eagle | BC - WCBS Bill Leonard | WT - Time | |
| DB - L.I. Press | BL - New Leader-WEVD | MP - Park East | |
| DL - | | | |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them not if they think they will be hits. "So-so" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

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| <p>THE FOURPOSTER-10/24/51</p> <p>GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50</p> <p>THE KING AND I-3/29/51</p> <p>THE MALE ANIMAL-4/30/52</p> <p>THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51</p> <p>MRS. McTHING-2/20/52</p> <p>PAL JOEY-1/3/52</p> <p>NEW FACES OF 1952-5/16/52</p> <p>A NIGHT IN VENICE-6/26/52</p> <p>MR. PICKWICK-9/17/52</p> <p>POINT OF NO RETURN-12/13/51</p> <p>SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49</p> <p>TOP BANANA-11/1/51</p> <p>WISH YOU WERE HERE-6/25/52</p> | <p>PROS: 29 CON: DH DP WGM WWM BL WC WNY</p> <p>NONE: DWJ WN WNR WSR</p> <p>PROS: 29 CON: WN</p> <p>PROS: 29 CON: WN</p> <p>PROS: 27 NONE: WGN MP WNR</p> <p>PROS: 26 CON: WCD WGN NONE: WN MP</p> <p>PROS: 19 CON: DM DJ BC DL WNR WT WGN BL</p> <p>NONE: WNR MP</p> <p>PROS: 25 CON: BL NONE: WNR</p> <p>PROS: 25 CON: DP WT WGN NONE: WN WNR</p> <p>PROS: 20 CON: DC WSR NONE: WGN WNR BC WT MP</p> <p>PROS: DT DN DJ DE DW CON: DH DM DP</p> <p>PROS: 25 CON: DW BL WN WNR WT</p> <p>PROS: 29 CON: WT</p> <p>PROS: 23 CON: DP DJ BL NONE: WCM WN WWR WSR</p> <p>PROS: DN DC DB DL DJC WV BL</p> <p>CON: DT DH DM DP DJ DW DWJ WB WWM WC WCU WNS WT WNY WSR</p> <p>NONE: DWW WCD WGN BC WCM WN WNR MP</p> |
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' Off Broadway '

Theatre de Lys opening postponed till October 29th...Second annual art of acting symposium sponsored by "Show Business" at Park Sheraton...Love in our Time, Originals Only current production in ninth week...La Boheme to be produced for six weekends at Amate Opera Theatre...Davenport Free Theatre begins its 300th consecutive season with program of one act plays...New Russian Theatre Association presents Vasilisa Melentyeva by Ostrevsky at Master Institute October 3rd. Four other plays will be produced this season...Blackfriars' Guild opens 12th season with Faith and Prudence, comedy by Lettie Michelsen...Magic City Repertory presents J. Van Drew's Ocean of Dust at Malin Studio...Bewn Adams Studio celebrates tenth anniversary with quartet of original plays...Manhattan Theatre Repertory Company to present The Cherry Orchard in November at Jan Hus House. Irvin Bizman will present three plays by Julie Marvin at an off-Broadway theatre...Widowers' Houses, Shaw's comedy at Greenwich Mews, highly rated by Atkinson, Times, for having right accent of satirical extravagance...Times reviewer also praised revival of Allegre offered at Lambertville, NJ.

' Green Room Department '

BEAUTY & CRITICS...Beauty can be a handicap to a serious actress seeking fair press notices, insists Watts, Post. George Jean Nathan and Franklin, Atlanta Journal, believe critics praise the pretty actress regardless of her talent; Watts denies this. The young women comics who are the reviewers' favorites would never win a beauty contest, while many critics seem to simply doubt that an attractive young lady can act well enough to rate raves.

VANISHING THEATRES...Though TV grabbed many former playhouses, several are vacant this year, notes Variety, due to shift of TV production to film...Broadway Theatre, being used by Todd-Thomas "Cinerama" was literally torn apart to house new three dimensional films, reports Watt, News...A Times Square theatre will be used as an "Automat" hears, Walker, News.

AUSTIN STRONG OBIT...Seventh Heaven author had power in his very look, Herald Tribune editorial recalls. General, kind, loyal, the perfect friend; memories of him are scattered around two oceans and in the hearts of friends. See back page for digest of Seventh Heaven.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Few youngsters who take part in the annual pilgrimage to break into NY theatre have sufficient attributes to be successful, reminds Burr, Playbill... No one, but no one, can guess with positive accuracy about a play in manuscript or in tryout, answers Morehouse, WT&S...Theatre ticket famine for plays with female movie stars predicted by Variety.

MAIL BOX...It is worse than foolish of theatre people to believe they should not take issue with their critics, points out Chapman, News. If theatre people do not complain or take issue, the theatre will be dead, and so will criticism. Jose Ferrer explained to the critic why he believes the actor gains from short runs...Two's Company producer James Russe received request for first night tickets from man with same name as his. Request granted.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES...7:00 PM Monday night curtain looks permanent to Richard Rodgers, he told Morehouse, WT&S. Several shows have played to standees...Frederick Knott, author of Dial M for Murder, is the kind of Britisher New Yorkers like to lionize, Rice, Post, reports from London. Play was written three years ago, made round of London producers, but wasn't bought until after a successful BBC TV production...Angels' chances can be better than average if he sticks to reputable producers and good authors, advises Meyer Davis to Variety. Davis never reads scripts.

' Theatre News Roundup '

The Moon Is Blue understudies gave performance of their play for Montauk, LI, Air Base men at Easthampton, LI...Two's Company stopped selling theatre parties for musical due to open December 4th. Twenty-three full houses had been sold...Seagulls Over Seabreeze closed after 12 performances...NY Critics Circle meets October 7th to elect officers...Mrs. McThing cancelled for one performance because Helen Hayes ill from laryngitis...Robert Dixon subbing for Jack Cassidy, Wish You Were Here...ANTA annual meeting October 7th...League of NY Theatres annual meeting October 9th...Equity to be pelted on issue of aliens...October 17th New Haven Railroad Show Train to see Pal Joey...Jose Ferrer, Bramwell Fletcher, and Bill Goodhart won prizes in Artists in Theatre Show Shop exhibit...Robert Preston, The Male Animal, guest of Twelfth Night Club...Helen Hayes, Mrs. McThing, selected as "Perfect Housewife Type" at National Home Furnishings Show, New York City.

' Digests of Famous Hits - Seventh Heaven '

Seven hundred and four performances is the long run record of Austin Strong's Seventh Heaven, which opened at the Booth, October 30, 1922. Produced and directed by John Golden, the cast included Helen Menken, George Gaul, Hubert Druce, Alfred Kappeler, William Post and Frank Morgan. Movie version in 1927 with Janet Gayner and Charles Farrell and 1937 movie version with Simone Simon and James Stewart helped make play a popular little theatre and summ theatre favorite. Cole Porter is considering writing a musical score for a 1952 movie musical which Arthur Lesser may produce.

Split decision recorded by daily and weekly critics on merits of Strong's script; while all but one weekly critic hailed Helen Menken as a star. Difference of opinion on script was whether the characters portrayed were realistic, fantastic or an unbelievable combination of the two. Leading man George Gaul in the role of "Chico" was panned by majority of critics for his phony French accent and poor performance.

Never has a young actress been more beholden to a playwright for a fine opportunity, which she accepts with instinctive grace and power raved Corbin, Times, in honor of the young Menken. Braun, World, agreed that her performance was extraordinary and exciting, though he couldn't tell the reason why. Post reviewer thought that with less able company play would have had little interest, but Golden was credited with gathering together a number of clever people. Darnton, Evening World, tabbed play divine comedy of Paris slums which was more human and appealing than most plays of this type. Abel, Variety, listed it as romanticism plus which should be a hit if playgoers patronize romantic fantasies. Patterson, Billboard, thought in spite of bad casting of Gaul and of Druce it remained a fine play. Menken's performance impressed him so much that the trade paper critic intended to go a second time.

Weilcett panned production as a group of motley impressions. Scenes ranged from good to bad to perfectly terrible. Except for Menken, members of cast weren't worth mentioning for he doubted if they played anything resembling real characters. Benchley missed opening and covered show five months later. To him it seemed the most artificial, impossible thing of the year. Dialogue written in wooden scrollwork style as if it had been translated, and read with a weird collection of phony French accents. If Menken's big scene makes her a great actress, then anyone who can scream, wave her hands, and push over tables is a great actress, he noted.

Interesting sidelight to 1922 theatre year was the complaint, reported in trade journals, of the theatre shortage. With 54 legitimate theatres open, four had already been taken over by the movies. In October, 1922 several shows were waiting out of town because of the lack of houses,

' Legit Stuff '

John Gerstad, The Male Animal, on leave from show to stage The Seven Year Itch... Friars lifted ban on women to honor Blossom Seeley...American Shakespeare Festival Theatre and Academy, Westport, Conn.

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